

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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FOLLOWING RECEIVED FROM RECIFE JUNE 7:

QUOTE

RECIFE 0108

3.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: OVIP (CARTER, MRS. ROSALYNN) CASC, BR
SUBJECT: REPORT OF IMPRISONMENT OF MENNONITE CENTRAL
COMMITTEE VOLUNTEER, THOMAS CAPUANO, MAY 15-18, 1977

REF: RECIFE 0107

AT AROUND NOON ON MAY 15, 1977, IN THE CITY OF RECIFE, PERNAMBUCO, BRAZIL, I WAS WITH FATHER LAWRENCE ROSE-BAUGH, A ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIEST, PUSHING A CART UP AVENIDA SUL TO THE MARKETPLACE IN THE PART OF TOWN CALLED AFOGADOS, WHERE WE INTENDED TO PICK UP SACKS OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES FROM THE MARKET STANDS WHICH WERE THEN TO BE DISTRIBUTED AMONG THE POOR IN THE CITY. IT WAS AT THIS TIME, AROUND 12 NOON, THAT A WHITE VOLKSWAGEN STOPPED AND TWO MEN ACCOSTED US AS POLICE AGENTS, DEMANDING TO SEE OUR DOCUMENTS. ALTHOUGH OUR DOCUMENTS WERE IN PERFECT ORDER, THEY CONTINUED TO QUESTION US WITH REGARD TO THE CART, EXPRESSING DOUBT THAT IT WAS REALLY OURS; WITH REGARD TO OUR NATIONALITY, EXPRESSING SUSPICION

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THAT WE WERE CONCEALING OUR IDENTITIES (ALTHOUGH BY OUR DOCUMENTS) IT WAS OBVIOUS WE WERE NORTH AMERICANS); WITH REGARD TO OUR KEYS, EXPRESSING SUSPICION THAT THEY WERE NOT OURS; AND WITH REGARD TO VARIOUS LESSER SUBJECTS AS WELL. OFTEN THE TWO OF THEM WOULD ASK SEVERAL QUESTIONS SIMULTANEOUSLY, AND WHEN I WOULD ATTEMPT TO ANSWER ONE OF THEM, THEY WOULD IN-

TERRUPT ME WITH OTHER QUESTIONS. WE INFORMED THEM THAT WE WERE MEMBERS OF FOREIGN MISSION ORGANIZATIONS: I IDENTIFIED MYSELF AS A MEMBER OF THE MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE, A PROTESTANT MISSION ORGANIZATION, AND LAWRENCE IDENTIFIED HIMSELF AS A ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIEST. FOR NO APPARENT REASON THEN, WE WERE TOLD WE WOULD BE TAKEN IN AND OUR DOCUMENTS SUBJECTED TO A ROUTINE VERIFICATION. WE WERE THEN HANDCUFFED AND TOLD TO ENTER THE CAR, WHILE THE MEN PARKED OUR CART AND BELONGINGS NEAR THE SIDE OF THE ROAD.

WE WERE TAKEN TO THE "DELEGACIA DE ROUBOS E FURTOS" (THE POLICE STATION FOR ROBBERIES AND THEFTS) IN THE SUBURB OF CURADO, WHICH IS A DEPARTMENT OF THE "SECRETARIA DE SEGURANCA PUBLICA" (STATE PUBLIC SECURITY DEPARTMENT), WHERE OUR CAPTORS EXPLAINED VERY BRIEFLY TO A MAN SEATED AT A DESK THAT THEY HAD PICKED US UP PUSHING A CART AND THAT LAWRENCE HAD SAID HE WAS A PRIEST. THE MAN SITTING AT THE DESK TOOK OUR NAMES, ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS, OUR WALLETS AND OUR GLASSES, AND OLD US THAT OUR CASE WOULD BE RESOLVED THE FOLLOWING DAY. AS WE STOOD BEFORE HIS DESK, VARIOUS CARS ARRIVED, AND SHOUTS AND SEVERAL SHOTS WERE HEARD, AND FIVE OR SIX MEN CAME IN. ONE OF THE MEN, WHO APPEARED TO BE THE LEADER BECAUSE HE WAS THE LARGEST AND THE CENTER OF ATTENTION OF ALL THE OTHERS, DREW CLOSE TO ME IN A MENACING MANNER, HIT ME LIGHTLY ON THE HEAD WITH THE GUN THAT HE CARRIED (WHICH APPEARED TO BE A RIFLE ABOUT ONE-HALF METER LONG), AND THUS FRIGHTENING ME, ASKED, "ARE YOU A COMMUNIST?" HE PUSHED ME VIOLENTLY INTO THE DESK, POKING THE GUN INTO MY STOMACH. NEXT HE SHOVED FATHER LAWRENCE IN THE SAME WAY THOUGH EVEN MORE VIOLENTLY INTO THE OPPOSITE WALL AND SAID, "YOU'RE SUB-UNCLASSIFIED

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VERSIVES, HUH? THIS IS A CASE FOR THE DOPS." (DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ORDER) HE THEN DISAPPEARED INTO AN ADJACENT ROOM. I THEN REQUESTED TO TELEPHONE THE U.S. CONSULATE, BUT THE SEATED MAN REPLIED, "DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT... I'LL DO IT LATER."

WE WERE THEN CONDUCTED TO THE JAIL, WHERE WE WERE ORDERED TO STRIP NAKED. WHAT MONEY WE HAD IN OUR PANTS WAS HO BE KEPT SAFELY FOR US AND RETURNED, WE WERE TOLD. WE WERE PLACED IN A CELL THAT MEASURED 3.4 METERS BY 5.0 MEYERS (WHICH WAS EASY ENOUGH TO CALCULATE, AS THEY WALLS WERE YILED). THERE WERE 15-17 MEN IN THE SMALL, STUFFY CELL, ALL OF THEM NUDE AS WE ALSO WERE NUDE, SITTING OR LYING ON THE CEMENT FLOOR.NTHERE WAS NOTHING IN THE CELL OUTSIDE OF THE PRISONERS. EVEN SO, THERE WAS ALMOST NO ROOM FOR US TO SIT, AS THE ROOM WAS FILLED FAR BEYOND CAPACITY WITH THE BARE BODIES OF THE OTHER PRISONERS. THE STENCH OF SWEAT, EXCREMENT AND MOLD WAS PUNGENT AND NAUSEATING. WE LEARNED FROM THE PRISONERS THAT MANTY OF THEM

HAD BEEN IN JAIL FOR 20-30 DAYS AND DID NOT KNOW WHEN THEY WOULD BE RELEASED. THEY DIDN'T EVEN KNOW IF THEIR CASES WOULD BE RESOLVED BY LAWYERS OR BY THE COURTS. MANY DID NOT KNOW THE CHARGES AGAINST THEM. ALL WERE HELD INCOMUNICADO. WE WERE ALSO HELD INCOMUNICADO, AS OUR EVERY REQUEST TO TELEPHONE THE U.S. CONSULATE WAS CONSISTENTLY IGNORED, DEFERRED OR OUTWARDLY DENIED BY THE GUARDS OR POLICE OFFICIALS. BY THE PRISONERS THEMSELVES WE WERE THREATENED WITH SEXUAL ABUSE, AND THEN WE WERE BEAT, KICKED AND SHOVED FOR ABOUT TWENTY MINUTES BY A PRISONER WHO SAID HE WAS "MENTALLY ILL." THOUGH THERE WAS A GUARD IN THE HALLWAY AT ALL TIMES, NO ASSISTANCE CAME FROM HIM.

BEFORE NIGHTFALL, WE WERE LED INTO THE HALLWAY WITH ALL THE PRISONERS FROM OUR CELL TO BATHE ONE BY ONE IN THE WATER WHICH SPOUTED OUT OF A PIPE IN THE WALL. THE SOUND OF THE GUARDS SLAPPING AND PUNCHING THE WET, BARE BODIES OF THE PRISONERS WAS CONSTANT. AT THIS TIME WE WERE MOVED TO A DIFFERENT CELL, WHICH MEASURED 3.4 METERS WIDE BY 8.0 METERS LONG; THAT IS, A LARGER CELL, THOUGH EVEN MORE CROWDED, FOR THERE WERE 34 PRISONERS THERE. MANY OF THE SMALLER PRISONERS WERE BEATEN FOR COMPLETELY UNJUSTIFIABLE AND ARBITRARY REASONS BY THE GUARDS IN THE HALLWAY AND THE LARGER PRISONERS. THERE WAS NO FOOD THAT FIRST EVENING.

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AT NIGHT WE WERE ALL FORCED TO LIE DOWN ON THE CEILING FLOOR. THERE WAS SIMPLY NOT ENOUGH ROOM FOR EVERYBODY, HOWEVER, UNLESS WE WERE TO LIE ON OUR SIDES, LIKE SARDINES IN A CAN. SLEEP WAS IMPOSSIBLE, SINCE THE HEAT AND THE SMELL AND THE SWEAT WERE UNBEARABLE. IT WAS SO CROWDED THAT THE LEGS AND ARMS OF THE PRISONERS HIT AND POKED THEIR NEIGHBORS, AND THERE WERE SOME PEOPLE WHO HAD TO SPEND THE ENTIRE NIGHT SEATED OR STANDING. ONE BOY HAD TO LIE DOWN ON TOP OF THE TOILET, BECAUSE IT WAS THE ONLY EMPTY PLACE.

WATER WAS NOT GIVEN TO THE PRISONERS MORE THAN TWICE A DAY, AT TIMES DETERMINED BY THE GUARDS. SEVERAL TIMES I WAS UNABLE TO DRINK EVEN AT THESE TIMES, BECAUSE I WAS AT THE END OF THE LINE AND THE GUARDS DID NOT WANT TO GIVE OUT ANY MORE. THE THIRST AND PARCHED MOUTH WERE AGONIZING THROUGHOUT OUR TIME IN JAIL.

SINCE WE WERE TOLD THAT OUR CASE WOULD BE RESOLVED THE NEXT DAY, WE AWAITED RELEASE ALL DAY MONDAY, MAY 16, 1977. WHEN EVENING CAME AND WE REALIZED THAT OUR CASE WAS NOT GOING TO BE RESOLVED THAT DAY, WE DETERMINED TO BEGIN AGAIN OUR REQUESTS TO TELEPHONE THE U.S. CONSULATE. ON THE THIRD DAY, MAY 17, INNUMERABLE REQUESTS WERE MADE TO CONTACT THE U.S. CONSUL,

BOTH TO THE GUARD IN THE HALLWAY AND THE GUARD AT THE FRONT
DESK (CALLED THE "PERMANENT"). ALL MY REQUESTS WERE IGNORED
OR REFUSED.

BY THE FOURTH DAY, MAY 18, IT BECAME CLEAR TO US
THAT WE AS WELL AS ALL THE PRISONERS WERE BEING SUBJECTED TO
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A SERIES OF CALCULATEDLY DEMORALIZING INHUMANITIES: A) STAR-
VATION DIET: IN TH MORNING THERE WAS NO FOOD WHATSOEVER. AT
NOON, WE RECEIVED A HANDFUL OF DAMPENED MANIOC FLOUR (PLACED
IN OUR HANDS) AND A PIECE OF DRIED MEAT THE SIZE OF A QUARTER.
IN THE EVENING, 25-50 GRAMS OF BREAD WAS GIVEN (THOUGH THAT
FIRST NIGHT THERE WAS NOT EVEN BREAD). THOSE PRISONERS WHO
HAD BEEN IN JAIL FOR MORE THAN 7-10 DAYS WERE EMACIATED AND
WEAK, THEIR RIB CAGES AND COLLAR BONES PROTRUDING. B) ARBI-
TRARY VIOLENCE: THROUGHOUT OUR TIME IN JAIL, THE SCREAMS OF
PAIN AND THE BEATINGS RECEIVED FROM THE GUARDS COULD BE HEARD
ECHOING DOWN THE HALL. ON THE FOURTH DAY, WE WITNESSED A TOR-
TURE SCENE: TWO ADOLESCENT BOYS WERE BEING BEATEN AND SHOVED.
THEN, ONE OF THEM WAS FORCED TO HOLD OUT HIS HANDS WHILE A HEF-
TY POLICEMAN SMASHED HANDS WITH ALL HIS STRENGTH, USING A
LENGTH OF BOARD. FROM THE SOUNDS PRODUCED, IT SEEMED THAT THEY
WERE BEING BROKEN INTO PIECES. C) UNSANITARY CONDITIONS: NO
SOAP WAS PROVIDED FOR SHOWERS. ONE DAY SHOWERS WERE DENIED
ALTOGETHER. LICE WERE EVERYWHERE AND BY THE SECOND DAY I WAS

INFESTED. THE TOILET CONSISTED OF A HOLE IN ONE CORNER OF THE ROOM. THE CLEANING OF THIS TOILET WAS NOT DONE ON A REGULAR BASIS; AT THE MOST, ONCE A DAY, BUT ONE DAY NO CLEANING WAS DONE AT ALL.

VISITS FROM RELATIVES OR FRIENDS WERE FORBIDDEN.
CONTACT WITH THE OFFICIALS OF THE JAIL WAS EXTREMELY RESTRICT-
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ED. CONSEQUENTLY, THE PRISONERS, MANY OF THEM VERY POOR PERSONS WITH NO CONTACTS TO HELP THEM AND WITHOUT A LAWYER'S ASSISTANCE, WERE FORCED INTO AN AGONIZING WAITING GAME, NEVER KNOWING HOW MANY MORE DAYS OF JAIL LAY AHEAD OF THEM.

ON THE FOURTH DAY, MAY 18, I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO REQUEST A FINAL TIME A TELEPHONE CALL TO THE U.S. CONSULATE. THIS TIME I MADE MY REQUEST DIRECTLY TO A POLICE INVESTIGATOR (DELEGADO) WHO HAPPENED TO BE IN THE FRONT ROOM, CLOSE TO THE DESK, WHEN WE WENT INTO THE HALLWAY TO TAKE OUR SHOWERS. I ASKED THE MAN, "MAY I CALL THE U.S. CONSULATE? WE ARE AMERICANS, AND WERE BROUGHT IN FOR JUST A ROUTINE CHECK OF OUR DOCUMENTS." THE MAN REPLIED, "DON'T YOU KNOW THIS IS BRAZIL, NOT THE UNITED STATES? YOU GOT THAT? BRAZIL, NOT THE UNITED STATES?" I ASKED AGAIN, "THEN I CAN'T CALL THE CONSUL?" HE REPLIED VIOLENTLY, "YOU'RE NOT GOING TO TALK TO NO DAMN BODY* YOU TWO ARE FUCKED UP*" (VOCE NAO VAI FALAR COM PORRA NINGUEM* VOCES ESTAO FUDIDOS*), IMPLYING BY HIS LAST PHRASE THAT WE DID NOT HAVE A HOPE OF BEING RELEASED, AND MUCH LESS OF CALLING THE CONSUL.

FINALLY, JUST BEFORE NOON ON THE FOURTH DAY, MAY 18, 1977, WE WERE CALLED TO THE FRONT DESK, WHERE THEY TOOK OUR NAMES AND THE NAMES OF OUR MISSION ORGANIZATIONS, AND SENT BACK TO THE CELL. TWENTY MINUTES LATER WE WERE CALLED AGAIN AND RELEASED. THE MONEY FROM OUR PANTS HAD BEEN STOLEN, BUT ALL OTHER VALUABLES WERE RESTORED INTACT. WE WERE TOLD TO LEAVE THE POLICE STATION. NO EXPLANATION WHATSOEVER WAS GIVEN.

I DID NOT WISH FOR THE FACT OF OUR IMPRISONMENT AND THE HARDSHIPS AND MISTREATMENT SUFFERED BY US TO BE THE OBJECT OF ATTENTION IN THIS CASE. RATHER, THE CRUELTY AND HUMAN DEGRADATION UNDER WHICH THOSE WHO REMAIN IMPRISONED SUFFER ARE WHAT DESERVE ALL THE ATTENTION AND CONCERN, AND ABOVE ALL, WORK, OF THE GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE. TRULY, THE DEPLORABLE CONDITIONS, THE LACK OF THE MOST BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS, AND THE
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BRUTALITY OF THE POLICE IN THE DELEGACIA DE ROUBOS E FURTOS APPEAR TO ME TO BE EQUAL TO THOSE OF THE COLONIAL ERA. I APPEAL, THEREFORE, IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST, LIBERATOR OF THE OPPRESSED, IN THE NAME OF THOSE UNFORTUNATE PRISONERS, AND IN THE NAME OF THE BRAZILIAN CIVILIZATION, WHICH I SO ADMIRE, FOR THE RAPID AND COMPLETE RESTORATION OF THE RESPECT AND DIGNITY DUE TO EVERY HUMAN BEING, NO MATTER HOW HUMBLE OR SCORNE HE MAY BE.

STATEMENT OF CONCERN BY MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE VOLUNTEERS
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMANE TREATMENT OF PRISONERS

THOMAS MICHAEL CAPUANO, A MEMBER OF OUR GROUP, THE MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE, WAS IMPRISONED AND MISTREATED MAY 15 TO 18, 1977, IN THE DELEGACIA DE ROUBOS E FURTOS (POLICE STATION FOR ROBBERIES AND THEFTS) IN RECIFE, PERNAMBUCO, BRAZIL. THROUGH HIS EXPERIENCE WE HAVE LEARNED FIRST HAND ABOUT CONDITIONS IN THE PRISON. AS HUMAN BEINGS AND BELIEVERS IN JESUS CHRIST AND HIS LAWS OF LOVE AND JUSTICE, WE FEEL STRONGLY THAT THERE IS AN URGENT NEED FOR IMPROVING PRISON CONDITIONS AND RESPECTING THE BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS OF THOSE WHO REMAIN IN PRISON.

THE INHUMAN AND INTOLERABLE CONDITIONS THAT EXIST ARE DESCRIBED IN THE STATEMENT OF THOMAS, AND OF FATHER LAWRENCE ROSEBAUGH: THE LACK OF SUFFICIENT FOOD AND WATER; THE SUBJECTION OF PRISONERS TO THE VIOLENCE OF POLICE GUARDS, AND FELLOW-PRISONERS; BEING HELD INDEFINITELY WITHOUT TRIAL; BEING DENIED THE RIGHT TO CONTACT LEGAL COUNSEL, FRIENDS OR RELATIVES.

WE ARE ENCOURAGED BY THE ATTENTION AND CONCERN BEING DEMONSTRATED BY PUBLIC OFFICIALS AND AUTHORITIES IN RELATION TO THIS INCIDENT. WE SUPPORT GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ON ALL LEVELS TO CONTINUE TO WORK TOWARD A MORE HUMANE TREATMENT OF PERSONS DETAINED BY THE POLICE AND HELD IN PRISON, ESPECIALLY IN THE DELEGACIA DE ROUBOS E FURTOS.

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MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE, A CHRISTIAN RESOURCE FOR MEETING HUMAN NEED, IS THE INTERNATIONAL SERVICE ORGANIZATION OF THE MENNONITE CHURCHES IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA. MCC HAS ITS HEADQUARTERS IN AKRON, PENNSYLVANIA, U.S.A., WITH A BRANCH OFFICE IN RECIFE, PERNAMBUCO, BRAZIL. PRESENTLY, MCC HAS 550 VOLUNTEERS IN 43 COUNTRIES IN NORTH AMERICA, LATIN AMERICA, EUROPE, ASIA AND AFRICA, WORKING AS NURSES, NUTRITIONISTS, AGRONOMISTS, SOCIAL WORKERS AND TEACHERS. IN PERNAMBUCO, WHERE MCC WORKS IN BRAZIL, THERE ARE 33 VOLUNTEERS WORKING IN AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND EDUCATION.

MCC, THROUGH ITS VOLUNTEERS, SEEKS TO HELP THE COMMUNITIES TO
DEVELOP IN THESE AREAS AND TO SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS
CHRIST THROUGH A WORD AND DEED WITNESS. END TEST
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